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SUBJECT: TOGO: UPDATE ON FLOODS: SOUTHEASTERN TOGO

REF: LOME 405

11. Summary. During travel to flood-affected areas in southeastern Togo, embassy officials noted that there are still many displaced persons, standing water, and increased traffic problems throughout southern Togo. One important bridge remains at risk, but people are already slowly returning to their homes. End Summary.

12. Driving east along the coast of Togo, the only noticeable impact of the flooding is the increased traffic, as shipping trucks are using the beach road for transportation of goods. When embassy officials traveled inland, they found standing water and people camped out on the edges of the water, cooking and staying in view of their homes. Lake Togo, which the Zio River feeds into, is overflowing with water; trees and parts of buildings were underwater along the banks.

13. A major bridge in eastern Togo at Aneho, near the border with Benin, is in danger at this point. The water is flowing down from the Zio River via Lake Togo to enter the sea at the coast, but the incoming tide prevented the water from flowing out, causing it to circulate in the area directly under the bridge. If the land on which the aging bridge stands continues to erode, it is possible it will collapse. This would be devastating for both Togo and Benin, as that is the only way to cross from the port in Lome to southern Benin.

14. Comment. If the water levels continue to slowly recede, as is expected, the displaced persons should be able to return home in the coming weeks. However, the negative economic impact the flooding will have in the coming months cannot be overemphasized. If the bridge connecting Togo to Benin breaks, the only convenient route between the countries will be cut off, which would also eliminate most trade between the two countries indefinitely. Commerce between Togo and its northern neighbors has considerably slowed since the bridge break of last week, and if this bridge fails as well, already critical food shortages will be further exacerbated.

TWINING